

Persistence

by tastewithouttalent

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Summary: "'You're persistent,' Ukai sighs without looking at Takeda."  
Persistence pays off sooner rather than later.

## 1. Convincing

Ukai doesn't even look surprised when he comes out of the gym and Takeda's waiting for him. Takeda considers this a victory, or at least a major step up from the growling eye-rolling he got initially, and he doesn't pause before he falls into step with the blond.

"So how was it?" he asks before Ukai can put together some protest to hide his obvious pleasure at playing again. "It was fun, wasn't it? You'll be back tomorrow, won't you?"

"You're persistent," Ukai sighs without looking at him. "I already told you I'll coach them until the practice match."

\_And beyond it\_, Takeda hopes but doesn't say. He has bought himself a few weeks, at least, for the players and for himself as well. Though he thinks he may be somewhat closer to his personal goal than he expected.

"I am," he agrees rather than pushing the subject. "It is my only charm."

Ukai glances at him sideways. "I don't know about that." He's not quite looking at Takeda, and he focuses forward when the older man turns to look at him properly, but even so Takeda is \_pretty\_ sure that was intended as the compliment he heard. He doesn't have a response ready, at least not a verbal one; he does flush pink with pleasure, smile at the path ahead of them, but there's a moment of silence before Ukai clears his throat and picks up the thread of conversation again.

"You really did pull out all the stops," he says. "Playing on my old rivalries, dragging my history into it - how much research did you \_do\_ on me, sensei?"

"Research is just a different form of persistence," Takeda points out. "I did enough to get you to join us, didn't I?"

"What if I had said no?" Ukai asks, but when Takeda looks up at him he's smiling into the distance.

"I would have kept trying," he says honestly. Then, because he really does think that was a compliment and he wants to return the effort: "I'm willing to do whatever it takes to seduce you." They're Ukai's own words - Takeda wouldn't have put it quite so bluntly - but he's been playing that phrase back over in his head all day and the sentence rises to his lips before he has \_quite\_ \_thought\_ through the implications.

The blond misses a step. Takeda is moving fast, nearly jogging to keep up, and with the other man's stumble he's in the lead for a moment before he can stop and look back. Ukai is moving again by then; Takeda gets a glimpse of a dark flush over his cheeks before the other man has caught him up and taken the lead and he's back to trailing in his wake.

"So." Ukai's voice is a little higher than normal. "That's how it is?"

For a moment Takeda considers playing dumb, acting like the implications of his last statement were entirely accidental. But he's never been very good at feigning ignorance in the rare cases when he lacks it, and Ukai doesn't sound angry. That's got to be a good sign.

"Yes." He drops into a run for a handful of steps so he draws alongside the blond instead of at his heels. "That's how it is."

"Huh." Ukai is still not looking at him, though Takeda is absorbed in what he can see of the other's expression in profile. "You shoulda just said something."

"I did," Takeda points out. "Just now."

That makes the taller man laugh, earns him a sideways glance that fires Takeda's blood with enough courage to keep talking. "So. Should I start camping out at the shop to learn your favorite food to get you to come to dinner with me?"

There's a pause, so long if Takeda weren't watching a slow smile creep onto Ukai's face he would be worried. Then the blond clears his throat, and turns his head to actually look at Takeda, and says, "No. It's not worth fighting you, I know a lost cause when I see it."

"You're a fast learner," Takeda says. When he tips in sideways to bump his shoulder against Ukai's arm the other man leans back into him, the pressure as reassuring as the embarrassed pleasure shining in the blond's face. "I'm always glad to have a willing student."

"Yeah, I bet you are," is all Ukai says.

They walk the rest of the way back to the shop in silence more comfortable than awkward. Ukai doesn't take Takeda's hand, but his fingers brush against the other's wrist more than once, and Takeda doesn't pull away. By the time they arrive at their endpoint, Ukai's slowed his pace enough that Takeda isn't half-jogging, and Takeda is flushed and too pleased to be self-conscious about the color high in his cheeks.

"So," Ukai says as they stop, and Takeda swallows and talks quickly.

"Tomorrow night. After the team's done practicing. Somewhere casual, so we can go straight out after."

Ukai nods, though his blush is getting darker with every word. "Yeah. Good. Sounds good."

"Okay!" Takeda feels like he's flying, too excited and too pleased to bother trying to hide it. "I'll see you tomorrow then!"

Ukai laughs, raises one hand in a wave. "Yeah. Tomorrow."

Takeda wants to kiss him, maybe just his cheek or his wrist if not his mouth. But that would be too much, too fast, so he doesn't, just smiles and waves and continues down the road.

It's okay. The flush on Ukai's cheeks and the smile curving over his lips will be enough to tide him over until tomorrow.

## 2. Convinced

For someone who looks so straightforward, Takeda is proving surprisingly difficult to fathom. Ukai has been trying to figure him out for nearly a week and with significantly more focus for the last day, and he is becoming less and less clear on what makes the other man tick. For example, ramen sounded like a great idea an hour ago when Takeda suggested it, his whole face lit up with excitement as much as with the setting sun. But Ukai's been watching him since they arrived at the restaurant, and if he wore glasses he wouldn't have suggested a meal that made it impossible for him to see throughout the entire course of the date. Takeda seems unfazed in spite of the steam constantly collecting on his glasses, though, and there is something inexplicably charming about the rhythm the older man has fallen into: take a bite, take off his glasses to wipe them clean, replace glasses, repeat. And he's kept up a running commentary throughout; Ukai offset his initial awkward self-consciousness by asking Takeda about his classes, and that was apparently the right question. The older man has been rambling about literature for nearly the entire hour, and while it wasn't Ukai's favorite subject in school Takeda's enthusiasm is at least as charming as the topic itself. The result is that Takeda is done with his dinner well before Ukai has for all that he's been talking and moving and just bubbling with delight through the entire thing. The blond can't even really settle down to eating until the smaller man is entirely finished and has subsided to smile sunnily at him from the other side of the table.

"Do you like the ramen?" he asks, and since he's chosen the moment after Ukai has taken a bite he just goes on talking while the blond tries to swallow. "This is my favorite place to come for dinner. Other than your shop, of course." He tips his head, smiles so bright that his eyes crinkle behind his glasses, and that is absolutely not fair, he cannot be allowed to look like that when Ukai is trying to focus on his dinner.

"Yeah," he manages, although to be quite honest he's far more interested in the dimple just at the corner of Takeda's mouth and the starry look in his eyes than in his food at the moment. "Yeah, it's really good."

"I'm so glad," Takeda smiles, and then he bumps his knee against Ukai's, as casually as if he regularly does this, as if they regularly sit at ramen shops smiling like idiots at each other. Ukai didn't even realize he was grinning until he can't take a bite for the expression curving over his mouth.

"Okay." He sets his bowl down, braces his elbows on the table and leans forward to cover his face with his hands. "We should go."

"Are you okay?" Ukai can feel Takeda reaching out for him, can feel the hesitation just before fingertips brush against the hair behind his ear. "I'm sorry, I've been chattering at you."

"No." Ukai shakes his head, and if that bumps his skin against Takeda's fingertips it's definitely not on purpose. Not at all. "No, I'm fine." He takes a breath, lifts his face from his hands. "It's just hard having a table between us."

Takeda doesn't blush, doesn't stutter or fluster or anything that Ukai is expecting; just another in an ever-growing list of almost-contradictions. But he does smile, wider than he has this whole evening, and his cheeks are very faintly pink with pleasure as he gets up to pay for dinner. Ukai doesn't protest - he had planned to, originally, but a lot of his initial plans collapsed when Takeda smiled at him after practice, and at this point he's just dealing with the situation as best he can. Just at the moment that means letting Takeda pay so they can get out of the restaurant faster.

It's only a few minutes before they're stepping outside and Ukai is breathing a sigh of relief. Now when Takeda tips his head up to smile at Ukai the blond can step in and drape his arm around the other's shoulders. Takeda is shorter by several centimeters and he fits under Ukai's arm perfectly; his narrower shoulders let the other man's arm curve around him like they were custom-made to fit together. Ukai was going to ask for permission, or for confirmation that this is okay, that he's not going too fast, but Takeda leans in against him without any suggestion on the blond's part, and the other's smile is brilliant even in the dim evening light, and the words die on Ukai's tongue along with his reservations.

Takeda goes perfectly quiet for the first time all night. Usually such silence makes Ukai jumpy with the need to say something, anything to break the tension, and it's not reasonable that after the constant chatter up till this point that quiet should be so comfortable. But Takeda is swaying in against him with each step he

takes, and Ukai is too distracted by the pounding of his heart to focus on words.

He has some vague intention of heading back to the shop via some roundabout path to give himself more time, but if that is what his feet are doing it's a very roundabout path, as they end up heading in the exact opposite direction. Takeda's not complaining, though, and the night is warm and the river sparkles moonlight up and off the smaller man's glasses, and Ukai is smiling again without thinking about it.

It was easy to let his feet lead him away from the shop, and when they draw to a halt Ukai lets that happen too. The whole evening seems to be about letting himself be carried along; this whole relationship seems to be about that, actually, and since resisting didn't do him any good the next thing to try is capitulation. So Ukai stops, and Takeda turns in against him and fits his arm around the blond's waist, and for a minute they just stand in silence.

"Did you have a good time?" Takeda finally asks. He sounds curious more than concerned, investigating for information rather than begging for a compliment.

"Yeah," Ukai says. He's trying to look out at the river but his gaze keeps dropping down to the top of Takeda's head, to the moonlit edge of the other's glasses when the smaller man blinks up at him. "But I want to pay next time."

"Next time?" Takeda says, and that sounds curious too, faintly hopeful rather than teasing.

"Yeah." Ukai's not looking away, not even trying to look away anymore. "Tomorrow."

Takeda's smile lights up his face, dimples at the corner of his mouth and curls into the corners of his eyes, and Ukai smiles back, soft and pleased even before Takeda reaches out to curl his fingers around the back of the blond's neck. He lets himself be pulled down an inch as Takeda comes up on his toes; their noses bump together for a moment, and Ukai's not sure if it's accidental or deliberate. But then Takeda huffs a laugh, and his mouth fits in against Ukai's, and the taller man stops caring entirely.

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